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SUBJECT: 30,000 DEMONSTRATORS DESCEND ON MOSCOW FOR MAY DAY

¶1. (SBU) This message is sensitive but unclassified; please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: On May Day, some 33 opposition groups, trade unions, and pro-government groups, numbering an estimated 30,000 individuals, took to the streets of Moscow. Protests were generally labor-related and focused on the economic crisis. Approximately 5,000 Communist Party (KPRF) members marched through Moscow. Similar protests occurred across Russia. As in recent years, these May Day protests were planned well in advance and were highly controlled, leaving little room for true dissent. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) On May 1, a number of demonstrations took place in Moscow, generally to protest against the economic crisis. Aside from United Russia, KPRF members held the largest event with an estimated 5,000 Communists marching through the streets of Moscow from the Statue of Lenin at Oktyabryskaya Square on the Southern side of the Garden Ring to the statue of Marx at Teatralnaya Square. The pro-government United Russia, Just Russia, and Yabloko parties, and opposition groups like Solidarity, as well as trade unions, held separate protests. Media reported on at least 33 rallies involving more than 30,000 people across Moscow. Many Moscow city streets were closed as 6,600 policemen provided security.

The Communist March and Rally

¶4. (SBU) KPRF members and sympathizers marched through the streets of Moscow to celebrate the May Day holiday. Marchers carried traditional banners calling on workers of the world to unite, as well as ones denouncing the current government as being opposed to the interests of the Russian people. The event culminated in a rally at Moscow's Teatralnaya Square, where speakers, including KPRF leader Gennadiy Zyuganov, praised Russia's history, harshly criticized Russia's present leadership, while declaring many aspects of Russia life (including its tax system) to be the envy of the world. Other speakers read poetry about the glories of socialism. Marching behind the KPRF were members of the National Bolsheviks, the Left Front, and Autonomous Stalinists. According to police officials at the scene, the march went off without incident. However, some new sources reported that some Left Front demonstrators were detained.

Many Participants Remember the Good Old Days

¶5. (SBU) Many participants were pensioners who said they were marching to publicly denounce the present Russian government, the West, capitalism, and the financial crisis, among other things. One pensioner said that she wanted to show the world that socialism is the wave of the future, as demonstrated by capitalism's failure during the financial crisis. She said the capitalist West had been robbing and colonizing the rest

of the world for over 50 years, as well as actively seeking to destroy first the Soviet Union and now Russia, and now was suffering the consequences. Socialism, she said, would bring about a more equitable, just world, once implemented. The current government, she said, should be forced to resign, as it was not adequately caring for the Russian people.

¶6. (SBU) Other older participants lamented many changes that occurred in Russia since the end of communism, including the increase in crime, the rise in prices for many goods, and the perceived increase in corruption in Russia. As the march proceeded across a bridge near Christ the Savior Cathedral, one older woman interrupted her description of life in Moscow during World War II to talk about how much she used to enjoy visiting the public swimming pool that was located where the cathedral currently stands. She has never been inside the cathedral, and does not plan to go, she told us.

¶7. (SBU) A small portion of the older demonstrators openly expressed their admiration for Josef Stalin. One man carrying a portrait of Stalin said that all large industries should be nationalized, although small enterprises such as barbershops and bakeries could be left in private hands. One woman wearing a baseball cap with "FBI" emblazoned across it carried a sign calling for Stalin's canonization. When asked how it would be possible to canonize the former Soviet leader, she walked away.

Little Youth Participation

¶8. (SBU) While some children attended the event along with

MOSCOW 00001138 002 OF 002

their parents, few young adults were seen in the crowd. None of the youth expressed anti-Western views, and some of them expressed interest in participating in the Summer Work and Travel program.

¶9. (SBU) Members of the communist youth group "Red Hedgehog" marched carrying banners of revolutionary heroes such as Anka Pulemechiza, a character in Russian literature and movies, as well as calling for higher pay for doctors. They said they joined the KPRF because socialism is far more just than capitalism. Even though they work in private companies and wear blue jeans, sneakers, and other Western-style clothing, they said they hope to build a socialist future in Russia. (Note: Red Hedgehog claims approximately 30 members. Their website is located at <http://ezovnik.narod.ru/ez/bc/>.)

Socialists of the World, Unite!

¶10. (SBU) Socialists from countries such as Greece and Turkey also joined the rally. One man claiming to be the leader of a large Greek socialist youth group said that he came to Moscow specifically to watch the May Day event, but was very disappointed by the low turnout. Some socialists from Turkey also attended the event because they "had some vacation time" and wanted to travel to Moscow.

Pro-government Rallies

¶11. (SBU) United Russia staged a rally near Moscow city hall in which Moscow Mayor Luzhkov took part. He called for nationalizing large enterprises and cutting the number of migrant workers (representatives of whom were reported to have participated in large part in Communist party-organized demonstrations). In general, though, United Russia rallies, with approximately 25,000 people, kept it bland, calling for Russia to "move forward," for families to have more children, and for greater support for small and medium-sized businesses.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) In general, the day was marked peacefully. With temperatures in the mid to high 40s on a sunny day, most people were enjoying the holiday by avoiding political activities.
BEYRLE